

Sheridan Press
Sheridan, WY
Circ. 6565
From Page:
4
12/22/2005
51015



104
**Whitney could benefit Sheridan
with land donation for Loucks St.**

Editor:

Since there has been some heated discussion about traffic flow in, around, and through Sheridan, I have an observation that I have not seen addressed.

Although there are at least two good north-south routes within the city and Interstate 90 makes three, there is only one major east-west artery and that is Fifth Street.

If Whitney Benefits really wants to benefit the community, why not donate the portion of Loucks Street that was interrupted by the placement of the old Central School back to the city?

Making Loucks a major east-west artery would allow for access and egress for those on the west side of Sheridan to Sheridan Avenue and also to I-90.

I believe such an arrangement would relieve a considerable amount of congestion, especially if some arrangement could be made at the post office once Sheridan State Bank has relocated.

Drive-through mail could be handled on the north side of the post office by turning from Scott and exiting on Gould or vice versa.

If the Postal Service says it doesn't have the funds or won't finance it, then possibly the city should take the initiative to make the post office-Loucks mess go away and make the city a happier place to live and get around in.

Mike Kuzara
Wyarno

Sheridan Press
 Sheridan, WY
 Circ. 6565
 From Page:
 4
 12/21/2005
 51015



104
**New Year's resolution: Work
 to get better city representatives**

Editor:

OTK and my Christmas list and New Year's resolutions:

I don't "want a pony" this year. Instead I'd like the real and average people to look closely at the takeover of the city by a few shameless (troubled?) people.

(Maybe I should call this a "pin the tail on the would-be elephant" warning.)

OTK has operated like a mini-Bush — i.e., hubris beyond the laws (be it criminal challenges or labor-contract voiding) because he didn't believe it would withstand challenge. Most lawyers know better.

Not many of us know how hard it is to try to spend family money to then appear successful.

Most of us have witnessed missteps but not blatant, ongoing attacks on the real workers of the city who risk danger and health challenges as part of their job descriptions. Those who keep us safe.

Speaking of job descriptions, where was the public job listing for a cushy "complaint commissar" (i.e., \$65,000 a year — with assistants to be awarded later)?

Now that OTK has an assistant and again this grossly overpaid complaint individual at a time of cutting back and then enhancing of salaries after health benefit contribution participation — where is OTK working?

Who are having their salaries cut in lieu of not handling the work that the elected officials and/or supervisors and management types have done in the past?

Really, folks, are we establishing, excuse me, are THEY establishing an over-class of payees?

Finally, practical matters: Is there really justification for relocating the fairgrounds (on our children's backs) because the fair is packed for two weeks a year? (Renovate what we have!)

Is there really anyone (other than a few select landowners and developers) who cannot imagine using the interstate as a paid-for and federally maintained, underused roadway versus the significantly disruptive payday (i.e., the Wasteway Parkway)?

Not to miss the fact of much beauty and positive effort — the Whitney Foundation. This is only one of many good (no, great) programs in the city.

This is not an excuse for complacency about City Hall and One Term Kinskey's troubled mismanagement campaign. Sure, he may have done a few good things — but we still have dirt roads and a damaged city work force.

For Christmas I'd ask that we all greet our police and fire and highway workers. We can't safely live without them.

For the New Year I will be more active to get our city better representatives. Will you?

**Free-Hawk Wilson
 Sheridan**

146-109-104-34
24-lot 'affordable housing' subdivision gains city approval

By Josh Mitchell

Staff reporter

Sheridan Press
Sheridan, WY
Circ. 6565
From Page: 1
12/21/2005
51015

The City Council approved the zoning and design of a 24-lot "affordable housing" subdivision Monday night.

The subdivision, Blue Sky Estates Planned Unit Development, would be located on close to three acres in the 1600 block of South Sheridan Avenue.

Developer Steve Grimshaw said the development would consist of 24 twin homes — dwellings that share a wall — and would be priced around \$150,000 for each separate home.

Grimshaw said the development will address a need for "affordable housing," which is in short sup-

ply in Sheridan, officials say.

Separately, on the second of three readings, the City Council approved zoning for the East Side Planned Unit Development that is expected to bring additional office, retail and residential space to the city.

The East Side PUD is a Whitney Benefits Inc. project that would be located near the intersection of Grinnell Avenue and Connor Street. Proposed are 95,000 square feet of office space, 45,000 square feet of retail space and 36 residences, including single-family homes and town homes

The development will be built as sites

are purchased to construct businesses, offices and homes. Whitney Benefits does not plan to build there.

In other business, the council tabled a request from Sheridan Even Start, a federally funded literacy program for disadvantaged families, to provide \$7,500 for a preschool teacher's salary until May.

Even Start Director Shauna Bowers said the program lost a sponsor (the Scott Foundation of Sheridan) and needs to shore up funding losses to keep an afternoon preschool program alive.

City Councilman Duane Farley directed Bowers to check with the state

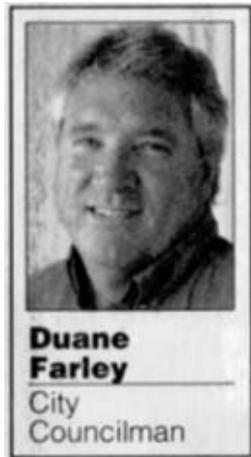
education department and the Sheridan school district to see if money is available there.

The council expressed concern that giving money to Even Start would set a precedent under which other day cares would ask for funding.

The council approved new ambulance rates, which have not been increased since 1999, according to Sheridan Fire-Rescue. The new rates boost the fee schedule to Wyoming's 75th percentile, meaning that 25 percent of the state's emergency services are charging more and 74 percent less.

The council said ambulance fees must be raised because the city is subsidizing Sheridan Fire-Rescue's losses.

Please see **City Council, Page 2**





Sheridan Press
Sheridan, WY
Circ. 6565
From Page:
2
12/21/2005
51015



City Council

(Continued from Page 1)

Fire Chief Patrick Reitz said the city has given the fire department \$288,000 this year. Reitz said \$200,000 came from from the 1 Percent Optional Sales Tax and the rest from the general fund.

"Why do we have to keep subsidizing?" City Council President Kathy Kennedy asked. "I think we need to get up to date (with the fees)."

In other action, the council allocated \$100,000 from the 1 Percent Optional Sales Tax for a new water slide at the city pool.

The current slide is 17 years old, and the executive director of the Recreation District, Richard Wright, has said there are safety concerns.

Police Chief Mike Card presented several options for beefing up city ordinances regarding nuisance farm animals. The chief's report came after a resident recently complained that his neighbor's crowing roosters annoyed him.

Mayor Dave Kinskey said he and city staff would look at the options.

Casper Star
 Tribune
 Casper, WY
 Circ. 31110
 From Page:
 1b
 12/26/2005
 51089



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Wright tornado tops state stories

By **DAN LEWERENZ**
 Associated Press writer

CHEYENNE — A midsummer tornado that tore through the town of Wright, killing two people and damaging or destroying one-third of the town's homes, was voted Wyoming's top news story of 2005 in balloting by newspaper and broadcast members of The Associated Press and by the wire service's staff.

Trent Blankenship's resignation as state superintendent of public instruction — along with the tension leading up to his resignation, and the bizarre period where he officially held

2005
 The year
 The people

two jobs — was a close second. The state's burgeoning coffers and the programs that money has helped to fund also made the list.

But the tornado was one of just two stories to appear on all eight ballots, and was listed no lower than fourth on any ballot. The Blankenship saga won more first-place votes — four of eight — but ranked lower on other ballots.

1. WRIGHT TORNADO: The twister struck with little warning the afternoon of Aug. 12 with winds estimated at 113 to 130 mph.

Two people were killed — Etienne Iriberry Sr., 53, died after

his home was hit; Connie L. Allen, 97, died later at Campbell County Memorial Hospital in Gillette — and Gov. Dave Freudenthal's request for federal disaster assistance reported 60 homes destroyed and another 59 damaged so badly that residents would need to find temporary housing.

"It's just total devastation of homes. There's just nothing left," Campbell County Undersheriff Scott Matheny said the following morning. "There are some homes that weren't even touched, but there's camper trailers turned upside down, and there's property and valuables strewn everywhere."

For more than a week, state and local officials worried that the Federal Emergency Management Agency would overlook the town. Three years earlier, no federal disaster declaration was made after a flood destroyed one-third of the homes in Kaycee. But President Bush signed the Wright disaster declaration on Aug. 22 — just a week before Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast.

2. BLANKENSHIP: There was no love lost between Blankenship and Freudenthal, but their working relationship took a turn for the bizarre when Blankenship reported that Freudenthal had once threatened him.

Please see **TOP TEN**, B2

Top stories from the past

Here is a look at the top stories of the year in Wyoming since 1990:

- 2005: Tornado kills two in Wright, damages or destroys a third of town's homes.
- 2004: Fiery pileup on I-80 kills seven, injures 29.
- 2003: War in Iraq claims six servicemen with Wyoming ties.
- 2002: Freudenthal's win ends eight-year GOP lock on state offices.

- 2001: East Coast terrorist attacks reverberate in Wyoming.
- 2000: Dick Cheney returns to politics, wins vice presidency.
- 1999: Two men sent to prison for murder of gay student Matthew Shepard.
- 1998: Beating death of Shepard draws international condemnation.
- 1997: Legislature approves plan for education finance reform.
- 1996: Mike Enzi wins bid to replace Al Simpson in U.S. Senate.
- 1995: Wyoming Supreme Court

- rules K-12 funding system unconstitutional.
- 1994: GOP sweeps state office, congressional races.
- 1993: Four Sheridan schoolchildren injured by gunman.
- 1992: Mark Hopkinson executed for ordering murder while awaiting trial.
- 1991: Reapportionment plan overturned by federal court.
- 1990: Execution date set for Hopkinson in 1979 death of Jeffrey Green.





Casper Star
Tribune
Casper, WY
Circ. 31110
From Page:
2b
12/26/2005
51089



Continued from B1

According to Blankenship, the governor said: "Don't ever cross me, or your head will be in your lap before you even know I've drawn my knife."

Freudenthal said he didn't remember the quote, but that he might have said it in jest. Blankenship said there was no kidding about it — that it was a threat. Politicians weighed in on both sides. And that was just the beginning.

In June, Blankenship announced he would leave his post to become superintendent of the North Slope Borough School District in Alaska, the nation's northernmost district. He said he would hold both jobs during the month of July, but that his new job wouldn't interfere with his responsibilities in Wyoming.

An Associated Press investigation proved otherwise, showing that Blankenship worked only nine days in July, and that even on days his calendar showed him working in Wyoming, he did not attend meetings he was scheduled to attend. At least two newspapers called for Blankenship to repay the state his salary for July.

3. HATHAWAY SCHOLARSHIPS: The Legislature approved the creation of a \$400 million trust fund to pay for scholarships for Wyoming high school graduates who attend Wyoming community colleges or the University of Wyoming.

A special task force spent much of the summer and fall working out details for the scholarship program, which was named after former Gov. Stan Hathaway. Those details, and the funding of the program, will go before the Legislature in 2006.

4. NEW PRISON: Lawmakers approved the construction of a new medium-security prison in Torrington, despite objections from finalists Rawlins and Riverton that many of the jobs and much of the eco-

nomonic benefit would go to people in Scottsbluff, Neb., just across the border.

The facility is expected to create 325 new jobs and should help Wyoming bring back prisoners who currently are housed in other states.

5. BUDGET SURPLUS: The 2005 Legislature had an estimated \$1.2 billion surplus to play with; going into the 2006 budget session, the surplus was expected to reach \$1.8 billion.

That surplus has helped the state set aside hundreds of millions of dollars for college scholarships, endowed faculty positions, wildlife preservation and other projects. But it also has sparked debates among politicians about how much the state should spend in its immediate needs — road construction, sales tax relief and mitigating the effects of energy development — vs. how much should be saved in the Permanent Mineral Trust Fund and other accounts.

6. GOV. HATHAWAY DIES: Former Gov. Hathaway died at his home on Oct. 4 after a long illness. He was 81.

During his two terms as governor, from 1967-75, Hathaway had a profound impact on Wyoming, enacting the state's first severance tax on minerals mined and pumped from Wyoming and creating a permanent trust fund where severance tax money is kept and invested, earning enough to run a major portion of the state's daily government operations today.

7. E-BINGO: The game was up Jan. 5, when Laramie County District Judge E. James Burke ruled that electronic bingo machines were illegal gambling devices.

Within days, bingo parlors across the state were closed down. Attempts in the Legislature to resurrect the game died when the House passed a bill specifically outlawing electronic bingo.

8. ARAPAHO CASINO: Wyoming's long legal fight against another form of gambling came to an end in July when the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a previous ruling that the state had negotiated in bad faith.

The ruling allowed the Northern Arapaho Tribe to go ahead with plans for a Las Vegas-style casino on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

9. LeDOUX DIES: Country music star and world champion bareback rider Chris LeDoux died March 9 from complications from liver cancer. He was 56.

The 1976 Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association bareback champion, LeDoux used to pass out tapes of his music at rodeos, earning him a loyal fan base. LeDoux was honored in July at Cheyenne Frontier Days, where he had ridden in his rodeo days.

10. EDUCATION AUDIT: Just days after Blankenship announced his resignation, an audit of his department revealed possible nepotism, poorly documented budget, apparent circumvention of state purchasing rules and improper reimbursement for training.

Blankenship dismissed the audit's findings, saying it was political, a claim disputed by State Auditor Max Maxfield and others.

OTHER TOP STORIES: The Legislature created a panel to review medical malpractice lawsuits; a new law creates penalties for public officials who improperly close public meetings; rain and snow help relieve the drought that had gripped parts of northern and northeastern Wyoming; state education officials and lawmakers begin to crack down on unaccredited colleges; despite returning 19 starters from a 7-5 team that won the Las Vegas Bowl, the University of Wyoming football team fell flat, losing its last six games to finish the season 4-7.

Powell Tribune
Powell, WY
Circ. 4600
From Page:
4
12/27/2005
51067



104

Academic rigor is the real test

The bothersome part of lowering the grading scale, as the Powell School Board did in recent weeks, is the perception that it will now take less work to earn an A.

There were understandable reasons offered for lowering from 92 to 90 the school district grading standard for achieving an A. The school district wants Powell students to compete for the new state-funded Hathaway Scholarships on the same basis as students across the state, and as a practical matter, most schools award A's for grades between 90 and 100. Though the rationale is there, it's probably not what the Hathaway Scholarship Committee expected.

Still, the reality of the grading policy change, we suspect, won't be that great. Teachers will still recognize 'A' work and grade accordingly. Some have said, in fact, that their response will be to grade a little tougher or to go away from grading on the curve altogether. The message in that should not be left to imagination: Don't think for a minute you can ease up, students.

The Hathaway Scholarships represent tremendous vision on the part of state leaders and tremendous opportunity for Wyoming students. We are pleased there appears to be legislative intent to fund the scholarships this year so that the new program can be ushered in to the benefit of 2006 high school graduates. Virtually all students who stay in school and get even decent grades will have the opportunity to go to a Wyoming community college or the University of Wyoming with the assistance of a Hathaway. The present model would award \$800 per semester to students who earn at least a 2.5 GPA and a score of 19 on the ACT exam; \$1,200 per semester to students with at least a 3.00 GPA and a score of 21 on the ACT; and \$1,600 per semester to students with at least a 3.5 GPA and a score of 25 on the ACT.

Grades do matter. The incentive is certainly there.

That said, the goal should not be simply to land a Hathaway Scholarship. The Hathaway is an incentive to go to college. The goal should be to be successful in college. The state's investment is repaid when students are successful in college. Students are rewarded by success in college when they acquire learning that equips them to realize their maximum potential.

That's where everyone should keep their eye on the ball. The short-term debate over whether a 90 or a 92 is an A should not divert from the real objective of preparing students to be successful in college. The number one predictor of success in college is the rigor of a student's pre-college curriculum.

Possibly, just possibly, as a by-product of leveling the grading standard, more students will be encouraged to take a more difficult course of study in high school, without fear of losing ground on the GPA. If so, that would be a good thing.

Lane Bonner